

30 2656

8133

8133.e12

R E M A R K S

ON

CONVERSATIONS

OCCASIONED BY

MR. BURKE'S LETTER.

[Price One Shilling.]

e12

R. E. M. A. R. H. S.

OR

CONVENTION

THE

THE



—

THE

R E M A R K S

ON

CONVERSATIONS

OCCASIONED BY

MR. ^KBURKE'S LETTER.

IN

A LETTER

TO A

PROFESSOR ON THE CONTINENT.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR GEORGE CAWTHORNE, BRITISH LIBRARY,
STRAND.

1796.

R. E. M. A. R. K. 3

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL



PROPERTY OF THE MUSEUM

LONDON

PRINTED BY GEORGE CANTON, ST. MARTIN'S LANE

1853

175

REMARKS, &c.

MR. Burke's pamphlet, my dear friend, has at length appeared. You received it by the last packet. Your curiosity has for weeks been on tip-toe—and our anxiety on this side of the water has, at least, kept pace with every tremor of expectation that can possibly have palpitated on the opposite shore. Within this metropolis, and probably within the range of our empire, the attention of every circle, whether fashionable, commercial, or literary, is at present drawn by irresistible attraction to the examination of "A Letter to a Noble Lord."

B

To

To a studious observer of human nature, the contrast of opinions, diametrically, on this subject, at variance with each other, suggests ample materials for reflection.

It will be a source of some astonishment to such as have not accurately ascertained the force of first principles, to such as have not examined the main movers of vast machines, to see how enormous a body has been actuated by a single wheel. Effects the most variously diversified have been produced from the same cause. A steel of imperceptible elasticity has given motion to the most complicated and most unwieldy of engines. The rotation still continues in a kind of "concordia discors."

Edmund Burke is again upon the stage. In his present situation, he resembles nothing in nature but the House of Commons, where all parties go in at the same door, and buffet each other till they are black in the mouth. His book has agitated the public mind, and the name of the author
appears

appears to be the pivot on which the far greater mass of opinion at present turns. The unqualified praises of many are heaped on the pamphlet, from no other motive than such as is connected with the signature annexed ; and the disapprobation of not a few might easily be traced to the same origin. I have listened, with silent wonder, to the bold declamation, and vague philippics, of those who had never given themselves the trouble, or rather indulged in the luxury, of perusing the work. You know, my friend, that such things are. Critics have expatiated on the other side with just as much "*connoissance de cause*." All this is, I own, provoking—but patience is a necessary virtue in our earthly peregrinations.

My subject, and it has my best thanks, is not so formal as to insist upon method and arrangement. I obey your injunctions, and communicate my remarks. They will be confined to conversations in which I have borne a part ; or to which I have been

doomed to the drudgery of listening. You will have the goodness to bear in your recollection, that I profess myself the advocate of the defendant. He stands, as he himself tells you, on his deliverance—and from you and the rest of his judges he claims nothing but justice. You may refuse, if you think fit, even to temper it with mercy—from me he shall receive the warm effusions of predilection. I make a public avowal of my prejudice in his favour.—The author of the Sublime and Beautiful is at the bar. I renounce the praise of impartiality; I beg that you will listen to me with suspicion. “Audi alteram partem.”—You have many correspondents in this country.

“When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war!”

And such is at present the case. I have heard much good sense, sound argument, and refined pleasantry, on both sides of the question.—I almost fear indeed that the “No’s” have had it.—But wit is not the test of truth—its touchstone is difficult to find.

find. Men of equal parts and equal integrity have drawn opposite conclusions from the same premises. We have not a mathematical proposition to work upon. Their judgments were contradictory, but they came from the same pure source of honour and of sense : they are lines drawn from the same central point, but leading to different parts of that vast periphery which constitutes the circle of opinions.

Persons of a different description have entered the lists, or rather have all drawn themselves up, on the same side, in battle array. Every class of varied puppyism has taken arms against the veteran. He is assailed at once by the sluggish and the flip-pant. The former croak forth their verbose dissonance, and the latter emit intemperate sallies which flash in the pan. Heads that have hitherto dispensed with the fatigue of forming judgments, seem of opinion that it is time to begin to think. They assume an " air rêveur," and do their best to connect ideas. The opportunity was a good

one, but their "coup d'essai" has not been a "coup de maître." They have perked in the beam, and their vision is darkened. They gazed for specks on the sun, and their eyes have been dazzled into obscurity. A peristaltic motion has taken place in their brain; and their mouths have voided something like that which it naturally produces elsewhere. The dunces have begun to be pert. Their lead has disappeared—they have vitrified their heaviness—and a kind of mental litharge has been produced. The recrement is base, most base. All the world seem rushing to the attack—crowd follows crowd. The word "Crop" has brought hosts into the field,—and an incidental expression, of no moment, has been twisted and twirled, and at last interpreted into a general attack upon the fraternity. But I believe that the author of so many immortal works has paid but little attention to the external decorations of other people's heads. They are free to follow the fashion of the day. As a badge of party, the curtailment may perhaps be an object of disapprobation;—but the adoption or rejection
of

of new modes, abstractedly considered, is a circumstance too insignificant for the notice of a philosopher. The thing is innocent ; and, should the fancy become general, will not be without its convenience. But I have known more time ineffectually consumed in attempts to torture the stubble of these modern innovators, into something bordering on the semblance of nature, than would have been required, in days that are gone, to complete the toilet of a finished Parisian. I have assisted at both.—But, all crops are not Anti-Burkites :—among these members of capillary circumcision, I have found warm admirers and staunch friends of the accused. This dorsal cutting off of superfluities is not universally a party distinction. And what if it were ?—Genius is of no sect—the weight of political differences is lighter than a straw, when balanced against merit.—Pitt or Fox, Loughborough or Thurlow, Scott or Erskine, the Abbé Sieyès or Edmund Burke,

“Tros Tyriusve mihi nullo discrimine agetur.”

But I wish to Heaven that all would act

an open part—that those who speak at all, would speak out. I have met with many subderisforious broachers of opinions—I believe the word is English—There are numbers whose expressions are so cautiously ambiguous, that their meaning is at the bottom of a well. There are not a few who admire the prodigy of intellect in my client—men exist who can simply admire such things. These half-formed wittings dwell, with delight, upon the eccentricity of his fancy ;—they expatiate, “ con amore,” on the wanderings of his imagination. They give him credit for much—but I hate their complimentary gifts—

“ Timeo Danaos, et dona ferentes—”

I wish they would join the opposite party. These snakes in the grass—for the word must out—fix upon a fastness ; and thence, by the heaviness of their hearts, or of their heads, or of both united, they draw up the spiral sluggishness of their lazy, unwieldy, flow, lubbering length of tail—and, at the final
con-

consummation of all things, out comes the sting. An infinity of time-servers have assented with civil leer—some have damned with faint praise—others have just hinted a fault, and hesitated dislike—not a few are gaping with open mouths, to swallow the opinion of the majority and foist it as their own : they forget that his praise is lost, who waits till all commend.

But the lower circles, my dear friend, have dashed into criticisms, as well as their betters.—There is something ridiculous, just at present, in quoting the authority of a hair-dresser—but mine has told me, and he is a thoroughly honest fellow—that barbers' shops and cellar clubs have taken up the business. I verily believe that they are just as competent to judge, as nine-tenths of the drawing-room orators. But in that case, it is a hollow thing. I find that it there goes to a man against us. You know my opinion on the subject of Equality. Regarded as a letter, my station is somewhere about the middle of the alphabet. I feel a satisfaction in fancying myself

myself placed there as a kind of middle term—and in thinking, that, as such, I combine the nature of the two extremes. I am bound therefore to look down upon the X's and the Y's and the Z's with the same quantity, though certainly with a different kind of respect, from that with which I look up to the A's and to the B's and to the C's.—I claim kindred with both—but “ne futor ultra crepidam”—let the barber shave on.

General invective has, in a few instances, attempted to particularize, to specificate itself—and something like a shew of charges has been brought against Burke,

I have heard, and you, my friend, will shudder when you read it—I have heard the fine, the eloquent expression of parental wailings, derided, and scoffed, and stigmatized as stage trick, and as whining cant. I have watched the malignant smile, and have traced it to a cankered heart. Let those who laugh, enjoy their triumph.

Thank God ! I have no relish for such joys. The good old man is not to be told, that the nerves of a nation's heart vibrated in unison with his own. While his tears trickled for a son, the people wept for the father. Had I known the venerable sage, he should have experienced in his hour of agony, how sweeter than the sweetest minstrelsy is the sigh of a sympathizing friend.

—The sanctuary of grief is a holy of holies.—There is something sacred in the sorrows of a mourner—something which the pride of philosophy has, in vain, attempted to despise ; and which impiety has scarcely had the hardihood to ridicule. The house of mourning is guarded by every prejudice connected with virtue. It is protected by the host of our finest feelings. Its garri-son is in the souls of all the benevolent. It is a fable tower upon a rock of adamant. —Turbulence of grief may riot within its bounds—or the sadder stillness of melancholy may dampen its recesses with the dews of death.—But no storms assail its battlements from without. The billows of the
ocean

ocean forget their fury at its base—and the thunders of Heaven respect its impassive walls. Let us turn, my friend, from this execrable charge—it has a sound that grates harshly on the ear.—Were I left to a mere selection of infamy, and condemned to the unavoidable ignominy of appearing before the judgment seat of posterity, either as the murderer of my own father, or as the deliberate, calm derider of tears such as parents shed, I solemnly protest that I believe I should hesitate at the alternative.

The tenderness of this worthy man's feelings affords another footstone for his accusers. An old story is vamped up afresh ; and I thank them, that they have done it—they had better have been silent. His eyes have moistened at the sufferings of a woman!—Behold his crime. He had seen the fairest of her sex in the luxuriant dawn of beauty, joy and youth. His imagination warmed at the recollection. He viewed the fatal reverse—and wrote from the heart. The tears that fell were overflowings of the milk
of

of human kindness. I saw her when the lustre of her diadem was beginning to fade—but its gems still shone with an autumn ray. I remember the air of dignified sorrow which mellowed too hastily the lilies on her cheek. Shamefully has this unfortunate Queen been traduced. Nine-tenths of the scandalous tales which malice has industriously circulated, are as false, and as unfounded, as that last impious charge to which the mother replied with all the majesty of offended nature. She was gay and unthinking. Transplanted from the cold regions of her mother's chamber, when scarce the baby blush had left her cheek—at the very moment when passions began to be strong, and ere reason had yet had time to cease to be weak, she was placed at once in the Versailles hot-bed of vice—in a court where immorality was fashion, and where a strumpet presided. What, in such a situation, some people may fancy themselves entitled to expect from a girl of fifteen, I know not—But this I know, and feel, and own—that against temptations so varied and alluring, the strength of man, in the full meridian of
his

his reason, would have proved but weakness.

“His saltem accumulem donis, et fungar inani

“Munere.”

Chivalry and dotage, are the catch-word.—
They are at him again. He has the misfortune not to be one of the fashionable Hot-tentots of the day. I feel, my friend, a glow of more than common satisfaction, when I hear that this hoary veteran in philosophy and in politics is the warm champion of an injured and insulted sex. That they should want one is matter of surprise. Men become monsters in proportion as they cease to adore them. I am sorry to remark that they are daily losing their influence among us. There are men in whom they seem to excite nothing but the grosser appetites. The refined sentiment which stood at the very entrance of our hearts, and beckoned to the sex, to enter and triumph, is dying fast away—its existence is classed among the weaknesses. Heaven forbid that I
should

should ever become strong ! The British character is undergoing a revolution. Politeness is not the order of the day. Attention to the sex will soon be an introduction to the Revolutionary Tribunal. The comparison of a rough diamond has done much harm. Men are not internally solid, in proportion to the asperity of their outside. The milder virtues are connected with those of a higher stamp. They thrive in the same soil, and twine together round our heart-strings. But the age of chivalry is gone, and the triumph of beauty is no more. The ornaments of creation, the perfections of nature, are driven contumeliously into the back ground. They enter society upon sufferance—they no longer give, they receive the law. The dignity and delicacy of their sex is insulted. They are deemed unfit for rational conversation. They must listen to the gross anecdotes of the chace, the tavern, and the gaming-table—they must consent to be initiated in the mysteries of the stew and the watch-house. The beastly law which drives them from the desert, continues

nues to disgrace even our best tables. I have seen them attacked in the strong hold of their modesty, and driven from their chairs by allusion to indelicate toasts. I remember, my friend, with rapturous regret, the circles of a different description, where the glass circulated with glee, and where the charms of female conversation added a relish to our Burgundy. We are sinking fast into something worse than Vandalism—and nothing but a vast effort of the whole sex, united in one general exertion, can rescue us from perdition. They are emissaries from Heaven to humanize and polish us. In their society we acquire virtues unattainable by any other means. As the magnet, without taking from its own force, can communicate to other bodies the power of attraction, so the female sex, without any diminution of its own excellence, can impart to ours that sensibility of heart, and elegance of sentiment, which give so inexpressible a zest to philosophy and science. This truth has been beautifully exemplified by Dryden, in the tale of Cymon
and

and Iphigenia, which he improved from Boccace.—In Cymon is represented a being nearly immersed in idiotism—till, struck with the charms of Iphigenia, his ideas began gradually to expand, and the rays of her beauty still operating upon his soul, he was at length refined into man.

These are thy powers,

O fairest of creation, last and best
Of all God's works !—creature, in whom excell'd
Whatever can to fight, or thought, be form'd
Holy, divine, good, amiable, or sweet !

The sensibility of Burke, restrained and limited, and concentrated, for a moment, in himself, supplies the basis of a third charge: Those fine feelings, which have long been accustomed to expand in universal admiration of talents and genius—which have ranged the habitable globe, in quest of provender, have been at length compelled, by the first law of nature, to turn and feed at home. He has been called upon to defend himself against a charge which implicated,

at once, his own honour and that of his benefactor. He repels his accusers by asserting his pretensions. He writes with all the dignity of conscious superiority—but I trace no vestige of vain boast or ostentation. I take it that he has too much pride to harbour vanity ;—and yet the dunces have got hold of the word, and bandy it about from pillar to post.

I have nothing to do with his politics, or his exertions as a senator :—to those points he has himself spoken.—But I will assert, that, considered simply as a man of letters, as a labourer in the vale of science, he deserves his pension, and more than his pension. It is not within my intention, or within my power, to calculate the piles which he has heaped, and added to the mass of our national honour—he has doubled its former bulk. His hand fixed the standard stamp upon our literary pre-eminence among nations. He has gained the sanction of the world to the aggrandizement of our claims as a wise and enlightened people.

I know from experience, that there is scarcely a corner in the southern divisions of Europe, and the same is I believe the case in the northern, where his name does not immediately excite the idea of acquisitions, more almost than human. He stands on the pinnacle of wisdom, and wields with facility and grace a more mighty selection of knowledge than ever was accumulated by man. He possesses powers, the bare conception of whose existence is a stretch of imagination—something beyond the grasp of common intellect. I am no advocate for lavish or indiscriminate profusion of the public money—but to one so distinguished, I should blush that the dross of exchequers were meted out with a thrifty hand.

Prodigality, in the remuneration of talents, is not the vice of the present Administration. They have erred in the opposite extreme. I lay their party writers out of the question—But on this subject, more elsewhere. Excepting in the distribution of ecclesiastical honours, we have seen of late

but few provisions made for men of letters. They have been left to starve ; or to fatten on the marl of their own genius. They have lived like the Marmot in winter.

The democratical tendency of the Letter to a Noble Lord is an aristocratical argument in the mouth of some of the topsy-turvy Jacobins. The spirit was I believe first broached among the journalists ;—and the idea has been since adopted by all those classes of retail dealers in second hand wit, who wind up their daily judgment by the key of their party paper. This seems, I think, to be the charge on which they fix their main hope. This they take to be their vantage ground—and hence they are preparing to direct the fire of their heaviest artillery.—But did these drillers and embattlers of mobs imagine, before Mr. Burke had published his letter, that he was more profoundly ignorant of history than any other man in the kingdom, not even excepting themselves? Did they really conceive that he was totally unacquainted with the
abomi-

abominable perversions of kingly authority, in all ages and all countries? that he was to learn from them,—that power is a dangerous trust—that it is liable to abuse—that things are not changed by names—that Henry the King was as bad a man, and as villanous a despot, as Cromwell the Protector—that Ruffel was as dirty a tool as Bradshaw—that there may have been rogues among the predecessors of a virtuous Prince—or that some among the ancestors of an honourable man (for such I am bound to believe the Duke of Bedford) were probably no better than sinners?

These people are really less enlightened than I conceived them to be,

The old threadbare, nameless tale of inconsistency is again ripped up, and brought into play. On this subject, our ears had, I thought, been dinned long enough, with the monotonous howl of vague declaimers, and puerile professors of new-fangled logick. Such lumps had, ages ago, been crammed

down our throats, that the stomach had nauseated, and the power of ingurgitation ceased—but they are at it again, these mountebanks of the purlieus of Bedlam.—The quacks are incapable of comprehending the system of “contra-indicants.”—They are at a loss to conceive, how that application can be injudicious to-day, which yesterday was prescribed ; and which to-morrow may again become necessary.

These State Physicians are not qualified to assist at consultations.

The wranglers cannot surely hope to draw him into controversy. The bird of Jove will scorn to stoop from empyreal heights, and pounce at reptiles. His talons must not be polluted with the slime of grubs.

The undiminished violence of this sturdy hero's aversion to the French Revolution, has been another subject of very strong, very diffuse, and highly varied argument. By some it has been dignified with the name
of

of virtuous perseverance—by others it has been degraded into criminal pertinacity.

On ideas respecting the origin of this great struggle, I had not the happiness of finding that my judgment was sanctioned by the approbation of Mr. Burke. We were for a while antipodes to each other—or, to speak more modestly, where he was a zenith, I appeared as the nadir. There was indeed a period in its history, and that of no short duration, when even his own eloquence must have proved inadequate to the expression of all the horror which I felt. But those are days which I hope are gone. When last I saw this people, at the outset of their Revolution, I believe, and am fully persuaded, that the general mass was sound in mind. They were actuated, I think, by the honest ambition of following an example which we had given them a century before. Such at least was then the opinion which I had, not hastily, formed. I own that they had my best wishes. They professed, for our Constitution, a fondness

amounting to the tenderest enthusiasm, We were then the " fils aînés de la liberté." —As such I have been greeted and stunned into deafness along the Boulevards, and on the Pont Neuf. I declined the hug of fraternization, but my heart yearned towards them—I looked upon them with a brother's eye. I hoped that Heaven would smile upon their efforts. The sword of glory unsheathed itself to my view ; and the hands that grasped it were not yet polluted with the blood of innocence. I marked the progress of passion—and I soon began to tremble for my favourite cause.

Empiricism became the order of the day. The people were cajoled into a fondness for wild experiment. Some, and indeed not a few, bent their necks to dangerous operations. From these has sprung the source of evil. A piston was introduced into the cavity of their stomach, and the marrow of their hearts was sucked away. Their very souls were materialized into a caput mortuum. An offensive state of corporal and

mental putridity succeeded—one vast phagedenous ulcer covered their limbs—their bodies broke out into sores—and the pustules afforded matter for a general inoculation. The worst of venoms became their natural food—it seasoned their dishes—it mantled in their goblets—it was mingled with the diet that nourished their children—the suckling imbibed it at the breast—the ovary of future mothers was re-opened, and the seeds of germinating animation were saturated with the poison. The disease became endemial; and few escaped the contagion. The slaver frothed at the mouth of the rabble—and favourite writers dipped their pen in the pituitous saliva. They vomited forth their crude lumps of indigestion—and something filthier than the banquet of a Westphalian sty was the repast of their midnight orgies. I have been within the influence of their nidorosities. I was not a stranger in the circles of Reincy and Mousseaux—I witnessed the first plottings of the dirty business which was afterwards matured into its fetid consummation at the Palais Royal. A
 general

general cynanthropy prevailed.—Man ran about, and bit at man. Morals perished in the wreck of religion. The right line of ethics was twisted into every variety of unnatural incurvation. Their metaphysicians started doctrines subversive of the order of nature. They have not increased, they have damped the energy of the species.—They have not invigorated—they have enervated, they have eunuchated mankind. The means were well proportioned to the end.—They embodied profaneness—consolidated impiety—unfettered licentiousness—

Cried havoc, and let slip the dogs of war.

The arch monster of Jacobinism perished with Robespierre—but, bristles were plucked, I fear, from the spine of the morkin. They have been transplanted and engrafted, and seem preparing to sprout again upon the brawn of the savages who survived.

Mr. Burke's violence may perhaps have been awakened, supposing the lion ever to have

have slept, by some recent transactions at home. My friend, there is foul play going on. Treason has stalked a little too triumphantly of late—she has already had her ovations. A part of the nation is indisposed. It seems affected with a kind of lenterick complaint. It has lost its power of digestion—it refuses, it loathes its natural food. Its new unlegalized caterers have played some vile trick. Would, that they had not volunteered their service! These runts of inofficial purveyors scuddle over the ground; and jostle honest people out of the path, with an air of as much busy consequence, as if the existence of the people depended upon their expedition.—But we soon see them return, not with wholesome loads of old English fare, but with new French kickshaw ragouts, that tickle the palate and burn up the intestines.

A sight like this may rouse the indignation of a cooler and less empassioned man than the author of *Some Modern Philippics*,

We

We live in perilous and portentous times. Such men as Burke are bound to exert their talents, and devote them to the service of the public. We have on both sides of the house, both within and without its walls, a rare assemblage of men distinguished by very superior acquisitions. I believe their patriotism to be equally pure—and that their difference of opinion is confined to the means of saving the commonwealth. They have, I trust, the same object in view.

The various classes of society have at this particular juncture most difficult tasks annexed to their respective stations. At the present critical period it becomes, more perhaps than it has been at any other, the essential duty of magistrates, to be firm but not to harass—to hold the reins of government with a steady, but not with a galling hand.

It is the duty of the people intrepidly to assert their claims; and not to suffer themselves

selves to be talked out of their rights. These rights have a double reference—as they relate to their governors—and as they recur back upon themselves.

The rights which they claim from the former, are protection in the full, unequivocal, unrestrained exercise of civil and religious liberty—and therein, of all the privileges of man, regarded as a social being.

From themselves, or, to speak more intelligibly, from the mass of the people, each individual claims as his right, the undisturbed enjoyment of domestic peace and internal tranquillity—of security from massacres and pillage—of exemption from the horrors of intestine broils. He claims the right of adoring his Creator, and respecting the laws—he claims the great, the important right of not being again driven back into a state of nature.

The tool of a tyrant, and the sower
of

of sedition, are foes alike to the Rights of Man.

But it is time, my friend, to conclude. My remarks have been desultory, like the conversations on which they have turned. They have not been free from prejudice, or perhaps from precipitation. I have cautiously abstained, in my invectives, from every thing bordering on personalty.---It is a rule from which I never deviate, either in speaking, or in writing. When great men are in question, it is difficult to reason with calmness---to me it is impossible---but I do not conceive myself to be rash, or intemperate. My warmth is, I believe, in general on the side of virtue. I am animated, I trust, by a legitimate flame---and my enthusiasm is, I hope, not that of an absolutely unlettered mind.

My next will have no reference to the present subject. As far as title pages justify conjecture, it may probably contain
an

(31)

an attempt to reply to some "Thoughts
on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace."--
Adieu.

LINCOLN'S INN,
March 2, 1796.

F I N I S.

(11)

an attempt to reply to James Thompson
on the subject of a Regicide Party.
Adieu.

Yours truly,
John Brown

210 EE 58

